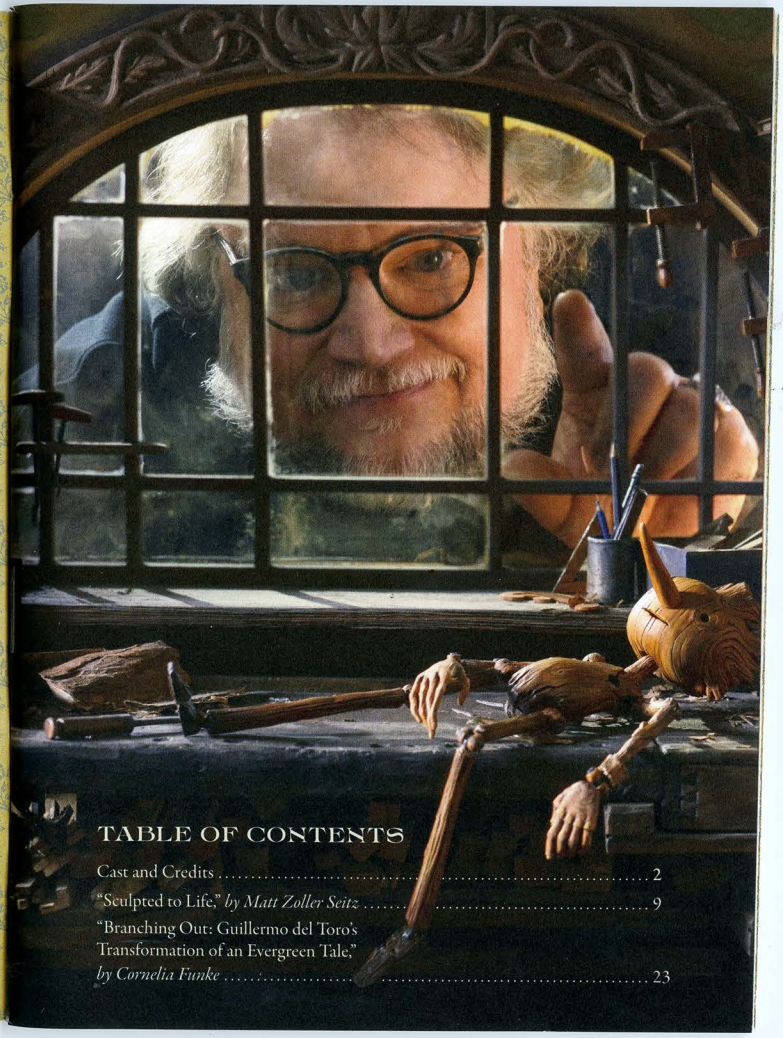
GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S

PINOCCHIO



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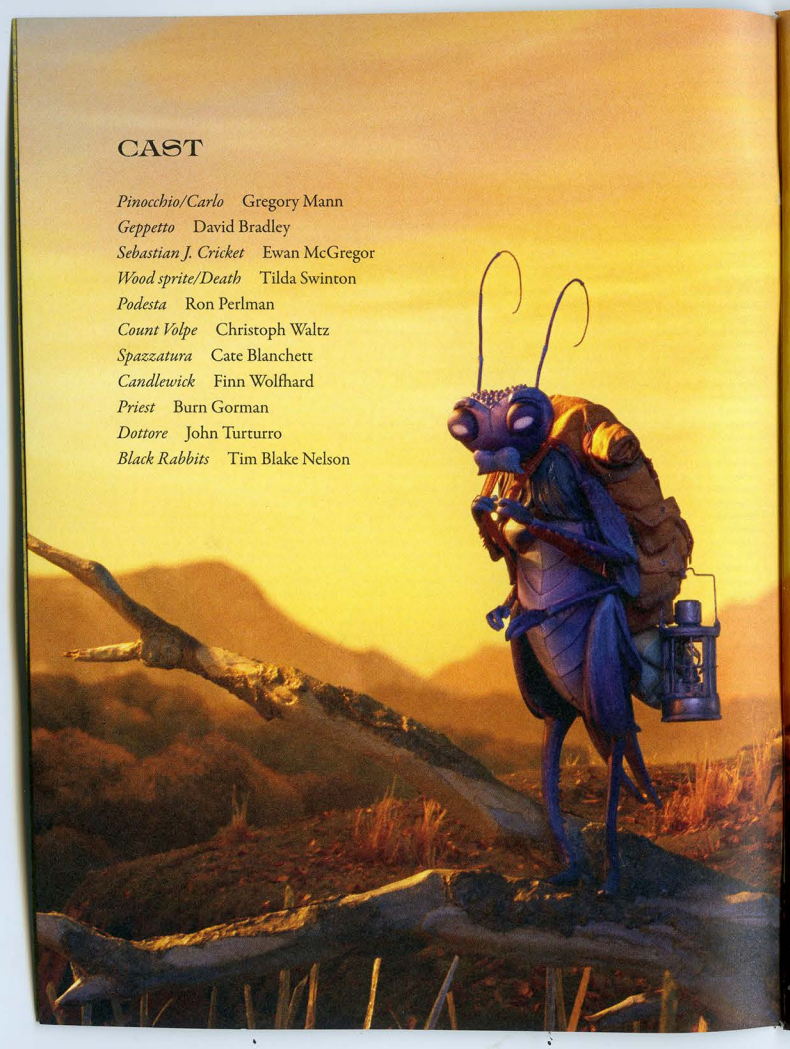
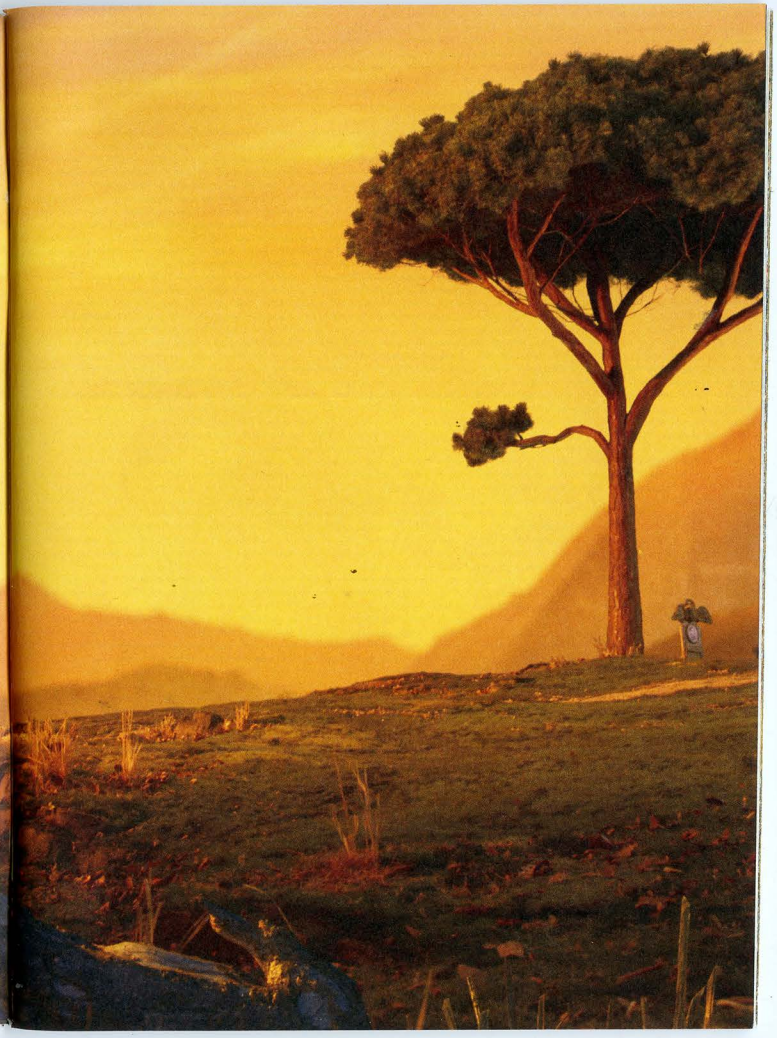
CAST

Pinocchio/Carlo Gregory Mann
Geppetto David Bradley
Sebastian J. Cricket Ewan McGregor
Wood sprite/Death Tilda Swinton
Podesta Ron Perlman
Count Volpe Christoph Waltz
Spazzatura Cate Blanchett
Candlewick Finn Wolfhard
Priest Burn Gorman
Dottore John Turturro
Black Rabbits Tim Blake Nelson





CREDITS

Directed by	Guillermo del Toro, Mark Gustafson
Produced by	Guillermo del Toro, Lisa Henson, Gary Ungar, Alex Bulkley, Corey Campodonico
Screenplay by	Guillermo del Toro, Patrick McHale
Based on the book Pinocchio *by*	Carlo Collodi
Music and songs by	Alexandre Desplat
Lyrics by	Roeban Katz, Guillermo del Toro, Patrick McHale
Coproducers	Melanie Coombs, Gris Grimly, Blanca Lista
Directors of character fabrication	Ian MacKinnon, Peter Saunders, Georgina Hayns
Director of photography	Frank Passingham
Production design by	Guy Davis, Curt Enderle
Edited by	Ken Schretzmann, ACE; Holly Klein
Animation supervisor	Brian Leif Hansen
Art director	Robert DeSue
Visual-effects producer	Jeffrey Schaper
Visual-effects supervisor	Aaron Weintraub
Sound designer and supervisor	Scott Martin Gershin
Rerecording mixers	Jon Taylor, Frank A. Montaño
Casting by	Mary Hidalgo

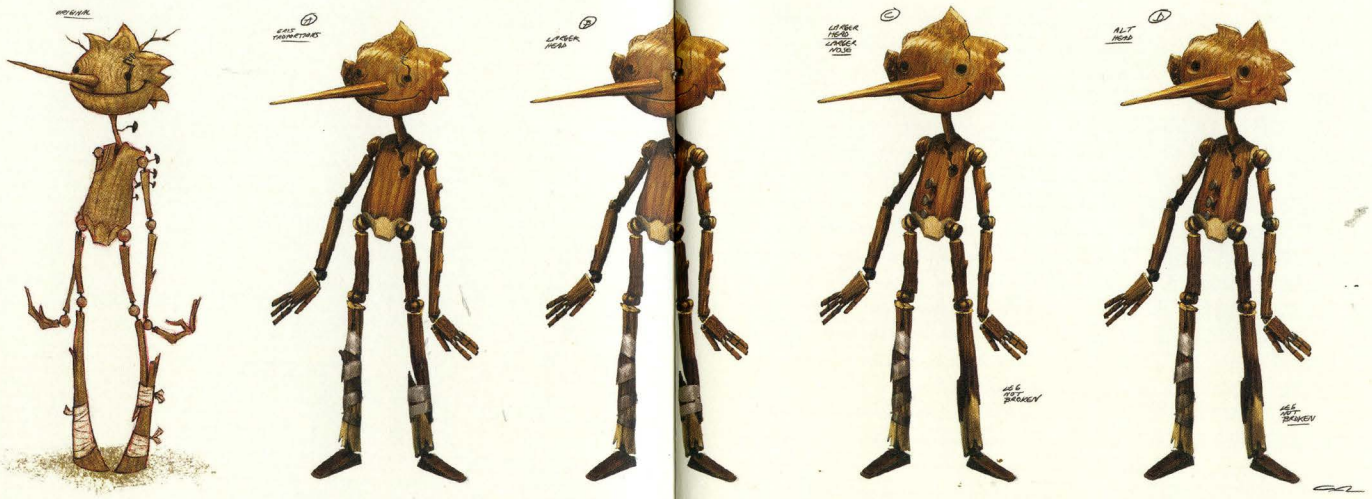
SIPARI
TAGLIAF CO

SCULPTED TO LIFE

— *by* —

MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

In June 2023—six months after the release of his Oscar-winning, stop-motion, antifascist-fable version of *Pinocchio*—Guillermo del Toro found himself speaking to an audience at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem,* an underground-comix-influenced, hand-drawn-looking cartoon feature, had just premiered at the festival, and two big-budget animated studio pictures released earlier that year, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse,* were dominating the box office. As he has been known to do, del Toro seized the moment to make a grand, hopeful statement about the potential of cinema—in particular, the animated part, which had enraptured him as a child in Guadalajara, Mexico, and inspired him to become a filmmaker. He said he hoped that the popularity of those three cartoon features would give filmmakers more latitude to "Trojan-horse a lot of good [stuff] into the animation world," adding, "I believe you can make an adult fantasy drama with stop-motion and move people emotionally. I think stop-motion can be intravenous. It can go straight to your emotions in a way that no other medium can."



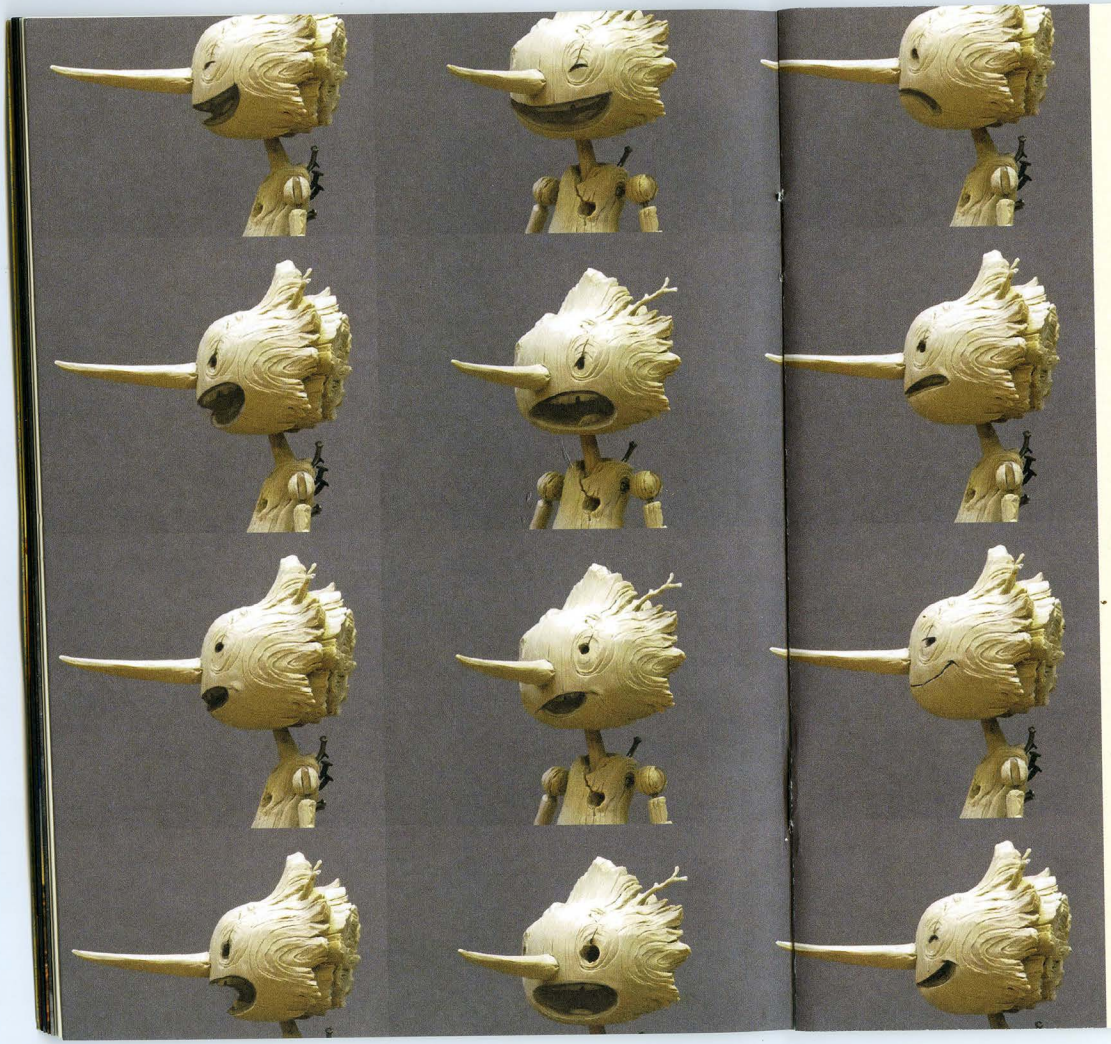
Del Toro knew this was possible because he'd just done it with *Pinocchio,* a movie that is perfectly fine with being unsuitable for younger children. Cowritten with animator and artist Patrick McHale from Carlo Collodi's source novel, and directed along with animator Mark Gustafson, it respectfully acknowledges the best-known prior film version, Walt Disney's 1940 adaptation, even as it subverts and critiques it, diving headfirst into metaphor and parable in service of a couple of del Toro's recurring themes, the corruption of innocents and the mechanics of fascism. *Pinocchio* is not merely a movie about a puppet, told through a clever variant of puppetry. It's a film about the *idea* of puppetry. It wants audiences to consider the possibility that whenever people open their mouths, other people's voices come out, even when they don't realize it, and that, to paraphrase another puppet master, Don Vito Corleone of *The Godfather,* they're dancing on invisible strings held by some big shot. Slightly older children who were not raised exclusively on the sanitized and shrink-wrapped snark-toons that have dominated multiplexes since the 1990s will likely find it fascinating, and appreciate that it respects their ability to process complexity and ambiguity. But for the most part, it's a movie for adults whose childhood memories aren't all golden, and who understand that nations and cultures can be parents too—and often bad ones. This is all conveyed in the film, set in 1930s Italy, through its entrancing account of a little wooden boy; his creator and father figure, Geppetto; and his guardian, Sebastian J. Cricket. It's an adult movie in the truest sense, meaning that it's filled with ideas that the youngest minds won't understand or perhaps even pick up on.

Del Toro is no wilting lily when it comes to dark subject matter, and parts of this *Pinocchio* are tough to watch without flinching. But where the 1940 version was extravagantly mean—Disney's early run of animated features, bracketed by 1937's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and 1959's *Sleeping Beauty,* was wondrous and terrifying in equal measure—this version is coolly matter-of-fact, in an old-world-folktale sort of way. It treats suffering as an unavoidable element of life, even if you're a puppet, and it heads off audience trauma with droll wit (after Pinocchio burns off his feet in Geppetto's fireplace, he excitedly tells his papa, "I like my old legs—and I like them on fire!"). Like so much of del Toro's filmography, which encompasses everything from his Spanish-language fables *Cronos* (1992), *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) to *Blade II* (2002), the *Hellboy* films (2004 and 2008), and other unabashed pop entertainments, the core of *Pinocchio* is its fascination with parents and children—mainly, though not always, fathers and sons.

Throughout his work, del Toro mirrors purity with corruption, selflessness with narcissistic manipulation, gentleness with sadism. *Pan's Labyrinth* juxtaposes the innocence of its young-girl narrator, the credulousness of her mother, and the smug vileness of the girl's new stepfather, a Falangist military officer tasked with hunting down Republican rebels. *Blade II* contrasts the altogether positive relationship of the half-vampire Blade and his mentor and surrogate dad Whistler with the emotional toxicity of a murderous family of genetically modified supervampires. For its part, *Pinocchio* compares many different parent-child configurations. Geppetto and his son, Carlo; Geppetto and Pinocchio; and Pinocchio and the cricket are nurturing pairings. On the other hand, we have Pinocchio's nemesis turned boot-camp colleague Candlewick and his father, the Fascist officer and bootlicker Podesta, and Count Volpe and his overworked and abused chief puppeteer, the monkey Spazzatura, whose commitment to the theater Volpe takes for granted. These fathers and sons fun-house-mirror each other in appearance and body language: Candlewick is a miniature uniformed

clone of Podesta, and the monkey has Volpe's plump, disdainful lips and winglike hairdo.

The recurring question, articulated through all the duos, is: Once the son has recognized that a father is self-serving, cruel, or both, will he rebel, and if so, what form will the rebellion take? Literally an empty vessel, Pinocchio somehow combines obedience with defiance. Sometimes he's a sweet, vulnerable, trusting child who adopts whatever value system is modeled by the adults closest to him, and other times (as in the song he sings for Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini) he's a Shakespearean fool or jester whose innocuous presentation lets him get away with things that would land others in prison—or six feet under. Candlewick and Spazzatura are also driven to rebel, though their impulsive actions don't have the desired results. As in his live-action films, the Spanish fables especially, del Toro establishes early in *Pinocchio* that his characters, like most real-life people, have zero or very little self-awareness, and are therefore not likely to realize that they've been conditioned, or that their values may be corrupt or just unhealthy. They



often resist oppression for instinctive, nonrational, personal reasons that they would probably never view in political terms. Candlewick doesn't see his father as an instrument of the state any more than Spazzatura understands that, no matter how hard he works, a monkey will never run a theater. Like Pinocchio, they are just children whose decisions are motivated more by a desire to gain adult approval and avoid unhappiness or punishment than to define themselves in relation to an ideal.

All *Pinocchio* adaptations are about the parent or guardian's responsibility to teach moral lessons to children so that they can be fully human—though in del Toro's version the father figures also often learn from their younger charges, instead of the other way around. His film also operates on a second, more abstract level, showing the relationship between unformed individuals and the societal values that forge their beliefs. The only reason the parent state doesn't get its hooks into Pinocchio instantly is because it doesn't know he exists until fairly late in the story. Once Pinocchio becomes a recruit, the state's conditioning supersedes all other influences. In roughly the same narrative spot where

the Disney version placed the pure-nightmare-fuel Pleasure Island sequence, wherein Pinocchio and other gullible lads are ensnared by their appetites and transformed into donkeys to work in salt mines, del Toro builds an equally disturbing but more politically trenchant sequence in which Pinocchio and other young men are ensnared with patriotic clichés, then deployed as tools of war.

This is also, in its way, a religious film. Why would God allow war, fascism, and other organized systems of inhumanity? Such questions are woven throughout, and *Pinocchio* never makes the error of trying to answer them definitively. Del Toro puts a very Christian (and often big-C Catholic) frame around the story. As an inquiry into why a supposedly caring deity would allow suffering and injustice, the film is akin to a Martin Scorsese or Robert Bresson drama of suffering and transcendence—or, for that matter, one of Terrence Malick's theological-historical cine-poems. Poor Carlo is contemplating an unfinished statue of the crucified Christ in the local church when he's killed by a random explosive dropped by a bomber crew on the way back to base ("to make their ballast lighter," the cricket's voice-over tells us, a phrase worthy of *Catch-22*). Geppetto grieves for years afterward, and the statue of Christ remains unfinished. A mordant touch: the movie crosscuts between Geppetto kneeling at his son's grave, contemplating his irreplaceable loss, and the priest and three altar boys back at the church, crossing themselves at the miracle of the destroyed roof and the untouched statue.

Technically as well as thematically, this is a film of staggering ambition and ingenuity done for what is, in live-action Hollywood terms, a pittance. But the scaled-down (in every sense) production seems to have freed the movie to take flight into what Willy Wonka called a world of pure imagination. Like all of del Toro's work, it looks backward and forward at the same time. The puppets and miniature costumes and sets are made from real materials, their scale varying depending on whether they're seen in close-up or wide shot. The movements are done the old-fashioned way: by having animators move the characters a little bit, shoot one frame, then repeat, over and over again for months. But the film was previsualized with a fluidity that would have been impossible in the days of pen-and-ink storyboarding, and the use of CGI and digital compositing gave the crew near-absolute control over every image, including the ability to correct mistakes and make style or timing tweaks during postproduction.

Too many modern movies overuse these tools, polishing every frame to sterility. Not *Pinocchio.* It strives to put across the sense that, in addition

to everything else, this film is a record of things that were actually *made.* As befits its main character, it's a sculpted work. You can see the wood grain, and you could count every tuft of wool on a character's coat collar and every chisel mark on Pinocchio's limbs and face, were you so inclined. The direction makes a point of grounding even the overtly epic images. Notice, for instance, the "heaviness" of the fatal bomb as it falls to earth during the thunderstorm, as well as the low-angled shot of Geppetto in front of the church watching the planes roar against the sky: There's nothing fussy or acrobatic about these images or any others. They get the point across in such a direct way that you don't think about the planning behind each choice.

Not content to channel only movies, del Toro's fantasies reach so far back into literature, religion, and mythology that they seem to exist outside time. We see this inclination on display again in *Pinocchio.* Its Italian landscapes are forced-perspective dioramas influenced by everything from Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting to Terry Gilliam's movies (especially *Time Bandits* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen,* handsomely produced fantasies with down-and-dirty countercultural sensibilities). Rather than

trot out another rotoscoped ingenue in a dress, *Pinocchio* represents the Blue Fairy, who intervenes in the hero's journey, as a mouthless, saucer-eyed, ethereal creature, somewhere between an extraterrestrial ambassador and a benevolent Harpy. Before assuming this form to visit Pinocchio, she is but one member of a school of translucent, one-eyed, tadpole-tailed elementals that float in the forest near Geppetto's house. They could be holdovers from the ocean's birth, or ageless beings from a Hayao Miyazaki film.

Speaking of Miyazaki: Del Toro once told me of his fascination with Miyazaki's use of the Japanese principle of *ma,* which the latter filmmaker described to Roger Ebert as "emptiness," such as the time in between the clapping of hands. "If you just have nonstop action with no breathing space at all," Miyazaki said, "it's just busyness." *Ma* is everywhere in del Toro's *Pinocchio,* which intersperses every scene with micropauses that let us take in details that are vividly lifelike in their seeming haphazardness. When the wooden boy performs a recruitment song in Volpe's theater and rises aloft on a cable-mounted wooden eagle, the prop swings and wobbles as it's lifted. When Geppetto speaks, his beard, mustache, and receding hair subtly move in a way that complements the motions of his body and face. Even when the characters are running for their lives or bracing to face the unthinkable, they bump into things, hit their heads, hesitate while speaking. This all helps sell the idea that you're watching real things happen to people you care about, rather than stop-motion characters on miniature sets who need a week's worth of labor to get them across a room. They are puppets, yes. But the craft of the filmmakers and the emotion of the audience make them real.

Matt Zoller Seitz is the editor at large of RogerEbert.com, a staff writer for New York *magazine, and the author or coauthor of best-selling books on film and television, including* "Mad Men" Carousel, "The Sopranos" Sessions, *the multivolume* Wes Anderson Collection *series,* The Oliver Stone Experience, *and* Guillermo del Toro's "The Devil's Backbone."

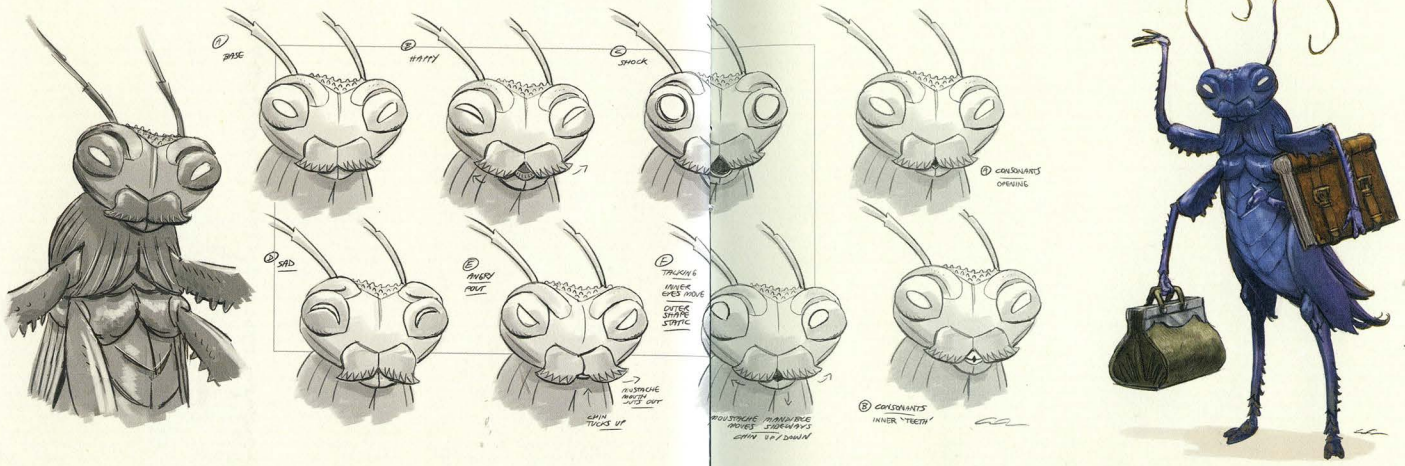
BRANCHING OUT

Guillermo del Toro's Transformation of an Evergreen Tale

— by —

CORNELIA FUNKE

THROUGH THE AGES, some tales have spread their seeds like trees, creating forests of imagination. Fairy tales often have that quality. But I doubt that Carlo Collodi, the author of the 1883 novel *Pinocchio,* would like his story to be called a fairy tale. He wrote it with clear intentions: to support his dream of another Italy, freed from Austrian rule and governed by democracy, which was only possible with children who went to school instead of working in the fields, thereby liberating themselves from the poverty of their parents through education.



Carlo Lorenzini—or Collodi, as he called himself later on, after the home village of his mother—was the son of a seamstress and a cook. Carlo witnessed six of his ten siblings die before they reached the age of seven. Some believe that *Pinocchio*'s blue-haired fairy, who saves the protagonist after he is hung from a tree, was inspired by Marianna Seconda, a sister Carlo lost when she was only six years old. Or was it Giovanna, the daughter of the gardener at a summer house that the writer's brother rented, as she was also around six years old and must have brought back memories of Marianna? Whoever the muse was, she instilled the theme of loss into the fabric of *Pinocchio.*

The marquise whom Carlo's parents served offered to send him to school, but the boy didn't want to become a priest, as his patron suggested—doesn't that sound familiar? Instead, he worked at a bookstore and became a writer. Collodi had a rebellious mind, and he was willing to fight for his beliefs, another trait he would give to his wooden hero. Collodi became a soldier twice to help make his dream of a united Italy come true. It did, but as a kingdom instead of a democracy. Disillusioned, he turned to words in order to fight for his ideas. He worked as a journalist and published satirical magazines, and one day he began to write for a children's newspaper, where Pinocchio made his first appearance.

I was a teenager when I first read the book, and I cried my eyes out. One late scene especially haunted me. Pinocchio finds a donkey on its last legs, starved and worked to death by its owner. I felt like kneeling beside Pinocchio when he realizes the abused animal is his friend Candlewick, who, along with many other boys trying to escape school, had turned into a donkey. We meet Candlewick in Guillermo del Toro's 2022 film adaptation too. There is no living storyteller I admire more than del Toro, but I admit that at first I dreaded the idea of watching his take on *Pinocchio*—especially because I was afraid to see the donkey scene rendered through his powerful and unforgettable images. It turned out, though, that in del Toro's adaptation Candlewick suffers a different transformation.

Poverty, hunger, and a life of toiling in the fields—Collodi's nightmares are quite different from the ones that del Toro finds in the tale of the wooden boy. In his interpretation, school is not a place of enlightenment and liberation. Del Toro doesn't believe in obedience as the foundation of a good father-son relationship. Parental love is a son's right, not something he has to earn by becoming exactly what his father wants him to be. Geppetto and Carlo, his human son; Geppetto and Pinocchio—in del Toro's film, they have a dark mirror image in Candlewick and his Fascist father. Fathers do not always love their sons; sometimes they break them. Del Toro leaves no doubt about that. But he also shows that sons sometimes teach their fathers to love. Even when they are made from wood.

Del Toro has always been a master at unmasking political realities with fairy tales. *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) is brilliant proof of how fantasy can reveal the cold heart of fascism and the prize—and obligation—of resistance. This time, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini watches a puppet show and is shocked by our wooden hero's missing strings and his rebellion. Candlewick's father was probably already a Fascist before he officially became one. In this retelling of *Pinocchio,* schools and churches grow the dark seeds of dictatorship and war with their demands of obedience, as do fathers who cannot love their children.

Looking at other film adaptations, Matteo Garrone's 2019 version probably comes closest to Collodi's original tale and message. It shows the poverty in rural Tuscany—and the donkey scene, Collodi's brilliant metaphor for the fate that awaits workers who can't read or write and toil away their lives, barely earning enough to feed their families. But Pinocchio even charms us as an American boy in the 1940 Disney film, where no hint of poverty or fascism can be found. The wooden boy whose nose grows when he lies, who falls down and gets back on his carved feet with a smile—one can't help but love him.

Is that the true reason why his story seems immortal? Collodi definitely loved him, although he tried to show him as a boy who misbehaves and needs to be taught. But every word betrays his love for Pinocchio's rebellious nature, his lust for life, his innocence and trust in people, his heart, so big despite all the selfish mistakes he makes. Nevertheless, I don't think Pinocchio's father loved and understood him as well as del Toro does.

I wish I could invite Collodi to the old cinema we have here in Volterra, Tuscany. I would like to see his face while del Toro's film plays and he sees his story grow like Pinocchio's nose, bringing forth hundreds of new leaves. Would he murmur, "This is very different from my tale"? Would he think, like me: Hmm. That pinecone, the motive of the lost son, and the wood from his tree—that's utter genius?

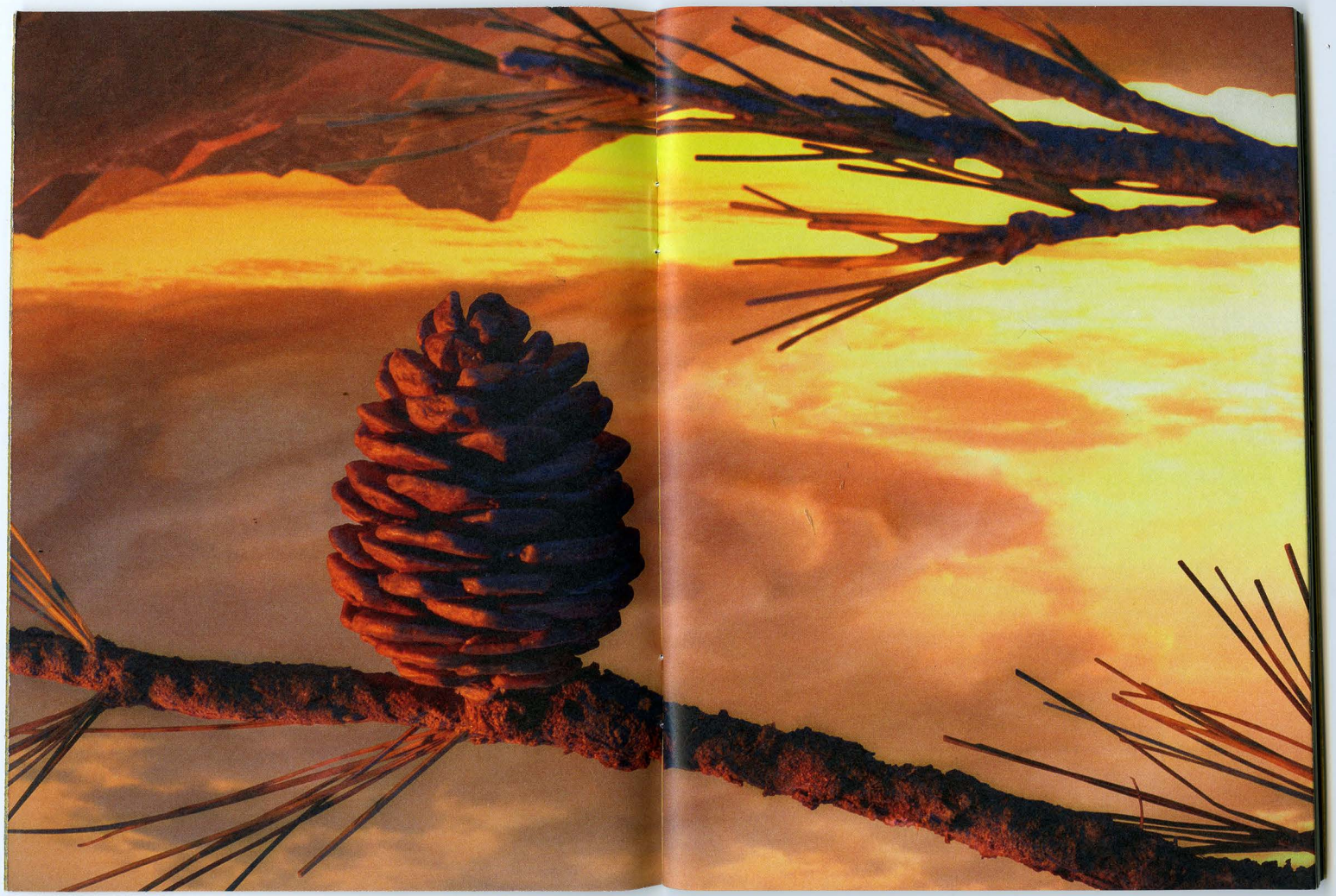
Del Toro's Pinocchio is not a boy who misbehaves, but one whose innocence makes him see the world as it truly is. And he is so full of joy that he nearly explodes into splinters! He is rebellious, courageous, and loving, and—most important—he dares to say *no* even when all the others say yes. Del Toro makes us wish for more Pinocchios in our time, with fascism newly ascendant all over the world and the gap between rich and poor widening, leaving ever more power in the hands of a few. He shows that obedience and conformism are far more dangerous than Pinocchio's wide-eyed questioning: "Why?"

In some ways, this adaptation is the first version of the story that is truly for children. And is that really a surprise? So many associate darkness with del Toro's work, but for me the most stunning aspect of his storytelling has always been his fierce belief in kindness and selfless courage. His films, though, never hide the fact that these qualities usually come with great sacrifice. And that is true for this movie as well. Pinocchio sacrifices his last life for his father. But . . . hurrah! He comes alive again thanks to the cricket (whom Pinocchio kills in Collodi's book—in some ways, it is still the darkest rendition of the tale).

I admit I am really grateful that del Toro didn't turn Pinocchio into a "real" boy—thank goodness! He is still allowed to be himself. And he gets the happiest of endings, better than in all the other adaptations.

Did Guillermo del Toro, the master of dark things, realize how desperately we need hope in these times? Or does he just love this wooden boy too much to let him die? I think it is the latter.

Cornelia Funke is a German storyteller and illustrator, published in more than forty languages. She lives in Volterra, Tuscany.



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